A Critical Review of a Recent English Pronunciation Program

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Nobuo Yuzawa

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1. Introduction

Every Tuesday from January to March 2009, a TV program teaching English pronunciation was broadcast on NHK's Education Channel. This was a unique program in that it focused solely on English pronunciation, which had been only partially dealt with in previous programs of this kind before. Although standard North American English pronunciation is popular among Japanese learners of English, this program dealt with standard British English pronunciation because, according to Yoshifumi Saito's explanation in the program, individual sounds are pronounced more clearly, which makes this pronunciation easier to learn. As an English phonetician, the author highly welcomed this well-organized program. However, there were points that need some reconsideration. This paper discusses such points to help improve a future program of this kind.

2. Features of the Program

The program in focus here consisted of 12 lessons, each of which lasted 20 minutes. Each lesson was made up of seven parts: introduction, story reading, phonetic explanation, practice, explanation of the story, talk, and quiz. Four people participated in the program: instructor Yoshifumi Saito, British assistant Rachel Smith, Japanese learner Harumi Nemoto, and Canadian phonetician Ian Wilson. It was Smith who worked as a model of the target English pronunciation in the program.

Each of the first 11 lessons dealt with one or two pairs of English phonemes, which were judged to be difficult for Japanese learners to distinguish. The last lesson focused on different stress placement according to word class. The theme of each lesson was as follows: /l/-/r/ (Lesson 1), /s/-/ʃ/ (Lesson 2), /əː/-/ɑː/ (Lesson 3), /ɔ/-/ʌ/ (Lesson 4), /æ/-/ɛ/ (Lesson 5), /ʊ/-/uː/ and /ɪ/-/iː/ (Lesson 6), /s/-/θ/ (Lesson 7), /p/-/b/ and /t/-/d/ (Lesson 8), /ɛ/-/eɪ/ (Lesson 9), /ɔː/-/oʊ/ (/əʊ/) (Lesson 10), /ɪə/-/iːl/ (Lesson 11), and

conTENT vs. CONtent (Lesson 12).

In the story reading session, a story was read aloud by Smith. Animation was used to help viewers understand the content. This story included the above-mentioned target sounds for each lesson. For example, in Lesson 6, /ʊ/ vs. /uː/ and /ɪ/ vs. /iː/ were included. The story, whose title was 'The Sealed Book of Magic', was read as:

> Two thieves, Luke and Philip, broke into a royal palace and discovered something shiny on the King's seat. 'Look,' Luke exclaimed, 'that looks precious!' 'Let's steal it,' Philip replied. But because it was sealed book of magic, they feared it might put a spell on them, and so put it back on the seat.

Underlined are the four vowels in question. Two comments should be made here. First, neither 'i' of 'it' and 'into' nor 'e' of 'exclaim' is underlined. The reason given in the textbook is that the former is pronounced differently and that the latter has two pronunciations. Second, the vowel of the second syllable of 'palace' is not underlined. The reason, which is not mentioned in the textbook, might be that this is pronounced not only /ɪ/ but also /ə/ (Jones, eds. Roach *et al.* 2006 and Wells 2008).

In the phonetic explanation session, Wilson explained from his laboratory the difference between the target sounds in terms of acoustic and articulatory phonetics. Smith became an informant in the lab and helped him with his explanation. In the practice session, Smith and Nemoto took a role of teacher and student, respectively. Nemoto practiced target English sounds in production, discrimination, and conversation. In the talk session called 'tea time', they talked about culture and language. At the end of the program, Smith pronounced one word and viewers were asked to answer which of the sounds learned in the lesson was pronounced. The answer was on the web site, with Smith's explanation.

The English phonemes are classified in the program as follows: six short vowels /ɪ, ɛ, æ, ɔ, ʌ, ʊ/, five long vowels /iː, ɑː, ɔː, uː, əː/, eight diphthongs /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, aʊ, oʊ (əʊ), ɪə, ɛə, ʊə/, five weak vowels /i, ɪ, ə, u, ju/, six plosives /p, b, t, d, k, g/, two affricates /tʃ, dʒ/, nine fricatives /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h/, three nasals /m, n, ŋ/, one lateral /l/, and three semi-vowels /r, j, w/.

3. Terminology

In this paper, standard British pronunciation is named BBC[1], and standard North American English pronunciation is named GA. It is certainly useful to use a specific short name to refer to each vowel. Otherwise, a lengthy description is required. To take /ɪ/ as an example, it can be described as a high, front, unrounded vowel, but to make a distinction from /i:/, an additional statement is required, such as: the tongue position is not as high and front as the production of /i:/. Alternatively, the terms 'lax' and 'tense' may be introduced. Neither of them, however, is practical.

Wells (1982) named English vowels with a key word in which a particular vowel is included. Since then, this terminology has been widely used among researchers around the world. This paper follows this tradition. It should be noted that there is no particular name for the weak vowel /ɪ/ and /ju/ in this system.

Each vowel is named as follows: /ɪ/ = KIT vowel, /ɛ/ = DRESS vowel, /æ/ = TRAP vowel, /ɔ/ = LOT vowel, /ʌ/ = STRUT vowel, /ʊ/ = FOOT vowel, /i:/ = FLEECE vowel, /ɑ:/ = START vowel, /ɔ:/ = THOUGHT vowel, /u:/ = GOOSE vowel, /ə:/ = NURSE vowel, /eɪ/ = FACE vowel, /aɪ/ = PRICE vowel, /ɔɪ/ = CHOICE vowel, /aʊ/ = MOUTH vowel, /oʊ (əʊ)/ = GOAT vowel, /ɪə/ = NAER vowel, /ɛə/ = SQUARE vowel, /ʊə/ = CURE vowel, [i] = HAPPY vowel, /ə/ = COMMA vowel[2], [u] = INFLUENCE vowel[3].

Where appropriate, each vowel name is used to represent its corresponding phonetic symbol in this paper. In the case of the HAPPY vowel, the COMMA vowel and the INFLUENCE vowel, it is weak vowels, not strong vowels that are always in question. The reason for the use of the brackets for the HAPPY vowel and the INFLUENCE vowel is mentioned below. This paper suggests the use of different symbols for some vowels, which is explained below.

4. Discussion

In the TV program, useful hints were introduced in order to help Japanese learners pronounce English phonemes better with phonetic information. To take two examples, first, in the case of the STRUT vowel, it was recommended to use the familiar exclamatory response in Japanese when something important is suddenly remembered.

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[1] The term RP is still prevalent, but in this paper BBC is used because RP is considered to be an old-fashioned and misleading name. See Roach (2009: 3).

[2] This vowel is known as *schwa*. From this term, a student at University College London once invented the terms *schwi* and *schwu* for the HAPPY vowel and the INFLUENCE vowel, respectively.

[3] This is also named THANK YOU vowel. This new name was first learned when the author attended an English phonetics workshop by Michael Ashby of University College London at Kansai Gaidai University in April 2009.

Second, in the case of the dental fricatives, it is almost always taught in Japan that in pronouncing them, the tongue blade should be placed between the upper front teeth and the lower front teeth. As explained in the program, however, they can also be pronounced by simply touching the tongue blade against the back of the upper teeth. This pronunciation hint for the dental fricatives is particularly useful not only because this way is much easier but also because this reflects reality. To explain how to pronounce them, Roach (2009: 40-41) says that the tongue is normally placed behind the teeth.

This section, however, will not deal with the program's positive points, which require no further comments. Overall, the phonemes introduced in the program were well explained, except for a few cases. This section critically reviews such cases.

4-1. Weak Vowels

In this program, /ju/ was presented as a weak vowel, but this may not be necessary. Wells (1982), for example, does not classify this as a separate phoneme. On the other hand, /ju/ is introduced as a weak vowel in Takebayashi and Saito (1998), but there is an important difference in the way this vowel is viewed between this program and Takebayashi and Saito (*ibid*). In the latter, /ju/ is treated as a weakened vowel of /juː/, which is classified as a long vowel. Takebayashi and Saito (1998: 48-49) claim that /juː/ can be classified as a separate phoneme for two reasons. First, historically /juː/ and /uː/ are different vowels. Second, there is a difference in spelling between long U and short U (e.g. 'cute' and 'cut'), just like long A and short A (e.g. 'mate' and 'mad'), long E and short E (e.g. 'Pete' and 'pet'), long I and short I (e.g. 'bite' and 'bit'), long O and short O (e.g. 'hope' and 'hop'), and long Y and short Y (e.g. 'style' and 'gym') (Takebayashi and Saito 1998: 211).

If /juː/ is treated this way, /ju/ can be phonologically supported. In this program, however, /juː/ is not in the inventory of the English phonemes, so there is no logical reason why /ju/ should be included as a weak vowel. In addition, words beginning with a vowel are preceded by /ən/ for the indefinite article or /ði/ for the definite article (e.g. 'an apple' and 'the owl'), but both /juː/ and /ju/ are preceded by /ə/ or /ðə/ (e.g. 'a unit' and 'the United[4] Nations'). This point may offer a good reason why neither /juː/ nor /ju/ should be categorized as vowels. It would be more desirable to regard /juː/ and /ju/

[4] The first syllable of 'United' is transcribed /ju/ or /juː/ in Wells (2008), but /juː/ or /jʊ/ in Jones, eds. Roach *et al.* (2006).

as the amalgamation of two different phonemes.

In the same way, the KIT vowel does not need to be separated as a weak vowel in the phonological system of English. A better and more simplified interpretation would be that this vowel is originally classified as a short vowel and can also be used as a weak vowel in words such as 'encode'. As far as the HAPPY vowel and the INFLUENCE vowel are concerned, they are not phonemes in the true sense of the term, because they are neutralized word-finally and pre-vocalically. That is why slashes are not used.

4-2. The GOAT vowel

This vowel is also somewhat problematic in the program. The major problem is that this is pronounced differently between BBC and GA. To clarify this fact, they are customarily transcribed in a different manner: /əʊ/ for BBC and /oʊ/ for GA.[5] As the notation suggests, the start-point of articulation is different. The vowel starts from the mid-central position in BBC but from the mid-back position in GA, both going towards [ʊ]. Since this program intended to deal with BBC, /oʊ/ was an unnecessary transcription. However, this vowel was introduced as /oʊ/ (/əʊ/). It should have been transcribed simply as /əʊ/.

Smith, who is from Liverpool, pronounced this vowel as BBC, but Canadian-born Wilson pronounced it clearly as GA. This qualitative difference between BBC and GA was explained briefly in the program as a general rule, but no explanation was made about the difference between the two native speakers. This difference should have been mentioned in the program. Otherwise, a British phonetician should have been chosen.

Smith attempted to demonstrate the difference between the two accents with the word 'boat', but she was not successful. Despite her intentions, she pronounced the GA version as BBC and the BBC version as a fronted /əʊ/. The correct distinction between BBC and GA in the GOAT vowel was not accurately demonstrated in the program. In the practice session, however, she pronounced the first element of 'coal' and 'roll' as [o], but this may show the tendency of younger speakers to pronounce the first element of /əʊ/ as [o ~ ɒ] when followed by /l/. Since the first element closely matches that of the GA counterpart, there should have been some explanation about this tendency in the program.

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[5] This custom, however, is not popular among Japan's English teachers.

4-3. The LOT vowel

In English, there are five pairs of phonemes with phonetic relationships between short and long vowels: /ɪ, iː/, /ʊ, uː/, /æ, ɑː/, /ɒ, ɔː/ and /ə, ɜː/ (Cruttenden 2008: 94-95). As the terms 'short' and 'long' imply, in these pairs there are quantitative differences. Strictly speaking, a condition such as 'under the same phonological environment' needs to be added because English vowels are quantitatively changeable depending on what follows them. More importantly, with the exception of the last pair, there are obvious qualitative differences between the two phonemes in each pair. Unlike quantitative differences, these differences are stable irrespective of phonological environments.

In Lesson 6, the first two pairs (i.e. /ɪ, iː/ and /ʊ, uː/) were dealt with, with a clear explanation that the two sounds in each pair are different both quantitatively and qualitatively, as can be confirmed by the use of different symbols in each pair. If the phonemes are transcribed simply as /i, iː/ and /u, uː/, the learner may get the wrong impression that the difference is only of duration. The use of the same symbol with or without the length mark had been adopted in Japan's English teaching until the late 20th century, but many English-Japanese dictionaries have switched to the so-called quantitative-qualitative approach, where both quantitative and qualitative differences can be transcribed, as shown in the program. It should be noted that the traditional quantitative approach is still adopted in the MEXT-approved textbooks, meaning that there is a serious discrepancy in the use of phonetic symbols between textbooks and dictionaries. This state, which is liable to confuse the learners, should be modified as soon as possible.

In Japan's English teaching, however, there is a serious exception in the case of phonetic symbol usage in the quantitative-qualitative approach. The qualitative different between the LOT vowel and the THOUGHT vowel has been totally neglected. At the time of writing this paper, not a single English-Japanese dictionary has ventured to use /ɒ/. As is clearly shown in any vowel diagram, the tongue position is quite different between the two phonemes – the LOT vowel is much lower than the THOUGHT vowel. This clearly indicates that there is a qualitative difference between them, just like between the KIT vowel and the FLEECE vowel and between the FOOT vowel and the GOOSE vowel. This qualitative difference, which is unchangeable in any phonological environment, is highly important. It is misleading to transcribe the LOT vowel as /ɔ/. It is a mystery why a decision was made not to show such an important qualitative

difference in transcription in Japan's English teaching arena, including this well-organized program, though a good decision was made about the use of the KIT vowel and the FOOT vowel. In fact, unless /ɒ/ is adopted, systematically there is no point in adopting such symbols as /ɪ/ and /ʊ/. At this point, systematic chaos is in progress.

In the program, the LOT vowel was compared with the STRUT vowel. The perceptual distinction between them is much more difficult in GA for Japanese learners (i.e. /ɑː/ and /ʌ/), as for many of them, both sound like Japanese /a/.

4-4. The NURSE vowel

The NURSE vowel may need to be reconsidered in the method of transcription for the benefit of Japanese learners. In this program, the NURSE vowel was transcribed as /əː/, but in the UK, it is commonly transcribed as /ɜː/ by using the different phonetic symbol to clarify the distinction between strong vowels and weak vowels. The schwa symbol is used solely for the schwa itself, not for the NURSE vowel.

Qualitative differences exist between phonemes such as /iː, ɪ/, but no such obvious differences are found between the COMMA vowel and the NURSE vowel, as Cruttenden (2008: 95) says that in /ə, ɜː/, an opposition is made of duration, the difference being that /ə/ occurs in unaccented syllables, whereas /ɜː/ can occur in syllables carrying primary or secondary accent. In this sense, it may not be a problem to transcribe the NURSE vowel as /əː/, as Wilson explained that this is a long schwa.

However, strong vowels and weak vowels should be firmly separated to learn English rhythm accurately. Rhythm is an important factor in making a particular language sound like that language. The COMMA vowel cannot be upgraded to a strong vowel. Many Japanese learners, however, fall into spelling pronunciation and pronounce the schwa with a strong vowel. The schwa of 'movement' and 'parrot', for example, tend to be pronounced [e] and [o], respectively, with the result that English stress-timed rhythm is likely to be lost. In this sense, to make learners more careful of the COMMA vowel, it is pedagogically desirable to separate the NURSE vowel from the COMMA vowel in phonetic symbols.

4-5. The DRESS vowel

Likewise, the way the DRESS vowel is transcribed may also need to be reconsidered. This vowel was transcribed /ɛ/ in the program, and in fact some

dictionaries and reference books adopt this transcription. In this sense, it is not problematic with the use of this symbol. It is also well known that phonetically the present realization of the DRESS vowel in BBC is more open than before and is closer to Cardinal Vowel 3 rather than Cardinal Vowel 2. The use of /ɛ/, then, might be more acceptable. In BBC, however, there is no phonological distinction in the height of this vowel. In such a case, symbols more familiar to learners would be preferred. Naturally, /e/ is a more familiar symbol. In addition, if the use of /ɛ/ is intended to describe accurately the recent change in the lowering of the DRESS vowel, the TRAP vowel should be treated in the same way and transcribed /a/. This vowel has been most markedly lowered in BBC recently – almost close to Cardinal Vowel 4.[6] If a decision has been made to use /ɛ/, it is desirable to use /a/ to maintain a consistent phonological system, as in Upton (2001).

It was mentioned in the program that the first element of /eɪ/ is slightly higher than /ɛ/. This idea may have led to the use of the different symbols to distinguish between them. However, this reasoning may not be very strong, judging from the narrow transcriptions presented in Cruttenden (2008) for the general RP realizations, where these two vowels are transcribed raised /e/ (i.e. [e̝]) and lowered /eɪ/ (i.e. [e̞ɪ]). As the terms 'raised' and 'lowered' suggest, the height difference may not be great enough to support the use of these different symbols. In such major works on English pronunciation as Jones, eds. Roach *et al.* (2006), Wells (2008), Cruttenden (2008) and Roach (2009), they are transcribed /e/ and /eɪ/. Rather than being more accurate in the qualitative difference between the DRESS vowel and the first element of the FACE vowel, it is much more important to pay attention to the qualitative difference between the THOUGHT vowel and the LOT vowel and to transcribe the latter as /ɒ/.

4-6. The THOUGHT vowel

The THOUGHT vowel is transcribed /ɔː/ both in BBC and in GA, but its quality is noticeably different. Both are back, unrounded vowels, but tongue height is very different. The BBC type is much less open than the GA type as Wells (1992: 145) states that the former lies between Cardinal Vowels 6 and 7 and the latter between 5 and 6. In fact, when BBC and GA are transcribed side by side or when BBC is taught to learners who are well versed with GA, the BBC type could be transcribed /oː/, as in Takebayashi and Saito (1998). At least some explanation should have been added about this

[6] A similar lowering is also reported for the KIT vowel. See Upton (2008: 242).

difference in the program.

Interestingly, the latest editions of standard pronouncing dictionaries such as Upton *et al.* (2001), Jones, eds. Roach *et al.* (2006), and Wells (2008) do not venture to adopt this method of transcription. There may be two reasons for this. First, traditional convention is too strong to change long-established phonetic symbols. Second, this qualitative difference is not very important in intelligibility. Therefore, there is no point in changing this familiar symbol.

There may be some cases in which the first reason is relevant. To take two examples, first, the STRUT vowel used to be pronounced like Cardinal Vowel 6 [ʌ], but now it is pronounced as a half-open centralized vowel. The more appropriate symbol at present would be /ɐ/. To the author's knowledge, however, this transcription has not been used in any dictionaries. Upton *et al.* (2001) made a compromise by continuing to use /ʌ/ for the STRUT vowel and by proposing the use of /ʌɪ/ for the PRICE vowel. Second, to transcribe the GOAT vowel, /əʊ/ would be more appropriate, not only because in English diphthongs the first element is stronger than the second, but also because the symbol /ə/ should be used exclusively for a weak vowel. Except for this diphthong, English diphthongs are transcribed with the first element being stronger in phonetic symbols. It seems difficult to change these symbols to match the present phonetic reality.

4-7. Fortis Plosives vs. Lenis Plosives

There are three pairs of plosives in English depending on where in the mouth they are pronounced: /p, b/, /t, d/ and /k, g/. The first two pairs were dealt with in the program (Lesson 8). It is well known that it is voicing that makes a distinction between the two phonemes in each pair, and the explanation presented in the program followed this common knowledge. However, in reality, it is more complicated than this.

Word-initially, the difference is in voice onset time (VOT, for short) – the duration between the release burst and the beginning of voicing. The three fortis plosives have positive VOT values, while the three lenis plosives have negative values. In /p, t, k/, a strong puff of air, known as aspiration,[7] follows the release of articulators, and this is why voicing does not start immediately after the release. In /b, d, g/, voicing starts around the middle of the hold or compression phase. It is this difference that makes the

[7] In the program, aspiration was explained by using a sheet of paper, but this was simply contrasted with the Japanese counterparts, not with the English lenis counterparts.

distinction before a stressed vowel. This is why researchers like McCully (2009). transcribe words like 'spin', where /p/ is not accompanied by aspiration, as /sbɪn/.

Word-finally, the distinction between the sounds in each pair becomes ambiguous – the lenis plosives tend to be devoiced.[8] The word-final /b/ almost sounds like the word-final /p/. This is the case with /t, d/ and /k, g/. The key to distinguishing them is the duration of the preceding vowel. For example, the vowel of 'mate' is much shorter than that of 'made'. This feature is known as pre-fortis clipping.

In an educational program like this one targeted at the general public, technical terms such as VOT or pre-fortis clipping are unlikely to be used. For educational purposes, however, it would have been possible to explain in the program the real differences between the fortis plosives and the lenis plosives in these respects, without resorting to voicing.

4-8. Additional Matters

In this section, four additional matters are discussed briefly. The first is concerned with the devoicing of the lateral. In the practice session of Lesson 1, where the distinction between /l/ and /r/ was targeted, 'place' was one of the words for the Japanese learner to pronounce. /l/ accompanies voicing, but when preceded by a fortis plosive as in 'place', it becomes devoiced with some friction. In the practice session, however, to emphasize the quality of the lateral, the learner made too much pause between /p/ and /l/, with the result that the /l/ was pronounced as an ordinary word-initial /l/ with full voicing. This should not have been the desired output. Smith, however, gave a positive judgement on such a pronunciation. She should have been more careful of her judgement or Saito should have made some comments on this pronunciation. Otherwise, some viewers may think that 'place' should be pronounced that way.

The second matter is about Smith's mispronunciation. Her pronunciation was overall very good as a model of BBC, but there were some occasions where her Liverpudlian accent appeared in two respects. First, the word-final /t/ was sometimes affricated, as in 'rabbit' and 'bet' (Lesson 8) and 'object' (Lesson 12). Second, when 'waste' was contrasted with 'west' in Lesson 9, the first element of the FACE vowel was slightly higher, with the result that this diphthong became much narrower in its

[8] This is the main reason why researchers such as Roach use the terms 'lenis' and 'fortis' instead of 'voiced' and 'voiceless'.

glide. In addition, she was not always perfect in pronouncing the phonetic differences between BBC and GA. One example was already mentioned – the GOAT vowel. The phonetic difference of the TRAP vowel (Lesson 5) was not clear enough. This vowel is more open in BBC.

The third is about Wilson's pronunciation. Because Saito stated clearly at the beginning of Lesson 1 that BBC was the model targeted in this program, it was natural that this accent should be used throughout the program, especially when Smith's pronunciation was analyzed phonetically. The expert on phonetics was Canadian-born Wilson, and his accent is not BBC. It was mentioned above that in his speech lab, he pronounced the GOAT vowel quite differently than Smith (Lesson 1). The same feature is the case with the LOT vowel, as in 'cop' (Lesson 4) and the noun form of 'content' (Lesson 12). His LOT vowel was less open.

The fourth is concerned with the way phonemes were selected. Besides the 12 types of contrasts introduced in the program, there are other contrasts which are considered difficult for Japanese learners, such as /æ-ʌ/, /ɑ:-ʌ/, /ɜ:-ʌ/, /m-n-ŋ/, /b-v/, /s-θ/, /z-ð/ and /s-ʃ/, /dʒ-ʒ/ and /ŋ-ŋg/. Because these learners tend to replace /æ, ʌ, ɑ:, ɜ:/ with the Japanese /a/ and make the distinction among them ambiguous, the first three pairs are important for pronunciation practice. The program dealt with only /ɜ:/ vs. /ɑ:/. The author heard from Ashby of University College London a story of a Japanese tourist who mispronounced 'damp' as 'dump' to the question 'How did you like London?', which damaged the natural flow of communication. It is easy for Japanese learners to pronounce the three nasals correctly when they are used word-initially though the velar nasal does not appear in this position in English. When they are used word-finally, however, the difficulty level suddenly increases. This is because in Japanese word-final nasals are not distinguished phonetically and are perceived identically as one phoneme. The distinction between /s/ and /ʃ/ becomes suddenly more difficult when they are followed by the FLEECE vowel or the KIT vowel. The Japanese /s/ is palatalized on such occasions and this influence makes 'seat' and 'sheet' identical in their pronunciation. This feature is the case with 'sip' and 'ship'. In the program, the pair /ɪə, i:l/ was also selected, but this difference may not be as hard as the pairs mentioned here. In addition to individual segments, there are at least two more points that should have been included in the program. The first is consonant clusters. In pronouncing them, Japanese learners tend to insert an unnecessary vowel between consonants. It was mentioned above that the Japanese learner in the program did not pronounce the lateral

of 'place' well enough though at least she did not insert such an epenthetic vowel. If common problems with consonant clusters had been explained in advance, her pronunciation would have been much better, which in turn would have helped viewers to pronounce consonant clusters more accurately. The second is intonation and rhythm. Concerning child language acquisition, Crystal (2006: 84) says that once intonation and rhythm begin to appear, the differences in language background are striking. An important assumption easily made from this is that if native-like pronunciation is targeted in learning English, mastery of its phonemes and allophones is not enough. Intonation and rhythm must also be learned carefully, with an effective method of transcription such as the tonetic stress marks.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, eight points were discussed to help improve a future program on teaching English pronunciation based upon the recent program broadcast on NHK. The discussion focused mainly on how some problematic phonemes should be explained and transcribed. Since there is more than one phonological system and more than one method of transcription in English, it is virtually impossible to choose a single system and method with which nobody disagrees. It is at least possible, however, to follow a commonly accepted system and method on an international level. Rather than sticking to local tradition and convention, this would be a realistic approach to more appropriate phonetic symbols for learners. The key is to present phonemic differences accurately. In Japan, the /ɒ/ symbol should be introduced as soon as possible because the use of /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ has been adopted extensively. This symbol is also indispensable if the target model is BBC, and not a Scottish English accent.

It is often difficult to detect speech errors especially when they derive from speaking habits that were naturally acquired in the course of language development. In a program of this kind, however, utmost care is required to produce the best model. People involved in the production of such a program should carefully monitor every pronunciation that is used as a model. Even a minor pronunciation error should be corrected and replaced by a better pronunciation for the benefit of the learners.

Additional important consideration in teaching English pronunciation is how sensitive the ear needs to be in order to recognize phonemic differences. In real communication, it is not only sounds but also contexts that help recognize these differences. Given a context, it is highly unlikely to mistake, for example, 'boat' for

'bought', 'rocket' for 'locket', and 'hurt' and 'heart'. However, once the learner has an ability to recognize phonemes accurately, then any new words can technically be broken into separate phonemes correctly – if none of them is elided. Then it is much easier to reproduce what is heard. Phonetic training, both in production and in reception, is important in learning English as a spoken language. A good program on teaching English pronunciation should be regularly provided to learners.

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Abstract

From January to March 2009, an English pronunciation teaching TV program, comprising twelve lessons, was broadcast on NHK's Education Channel. The target accent was BBC pronunciation. Sufficient practice in both production and reception as well as useful hints for pronunciation were provided in every lesson, along with visual displays of the target sounds dealt with in each lesson from a phonetics laboratory. This program was well organized and informative for learning English pronunciation. It is believed, however, that parts of the program may require some reconsideration. This paper discusses eight problematic points for the benefit of improving a future program of this kind.

Associate Professor, Utsunomiya University